Commercial Center Development Policy

City of Mesa Planning Department

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I. PURPOSE AND INTENT

The Commercial Center Development Policy has been established to provide direction and guidance regarding the City's interest in promoting high quality commercial development, enhancing quality of life values, protecting and improving investments, and encouraging economic opportunities. This policy is intended to encourage an integrated, coordinated, high quality approach to building design, site layout, vehicular and pedestrian circulation, landscaping, and parking lot design within commercial developments. The intent is to assist developers, business owners, property owners, board and council members, residents, interested citizens, staff and all others who have an interest in supporting high quality development of commercial centers in Mesa.

Commercial centers have become more important in people's daily lives not merely as locations to obtain goods and services but as places that define a major component of their basic quality of life experience. It is expected that commercial centers will be developed with design features and site amenities that are appropriate to the type and scale of development that is proposed.

According to the Mesa General Plan 2025, there are an estimated 83 multi-tenant retail centers in Mesa at this time and this accounts for about 70 percent of retail trade in the city. The majority of commercial activity in the City currently occurs in shopping centers and the trend indicates the percentage is likely to increase. It is in the public interest to encourage commercial projects to be developed with integrated site design, complimentary building architecture, efficient, safe traffic circulation and attractive site amenities.

II. APPLICABILITY

The Commercial Center Design Guidelines apply to both proposed new commercial developments and renovations of existing commercial properties that are otherwise subject to review by the City Council, Planning and Zoning Board, Design Review Board, through an Administrative Approval process, and/or through Construction Documents Plan Review.

III. TYPES OF COMMERCIAL CENTERS

The application of these guidelines is intended for multi-tenant commercial centers, however, individual stores or freestanding buildings can use the policy guidelines to assist with design and development. Since commercial development trends typically evolve and change due to both external and internal market forces, the specific configuration and definition of various types of centers may also evolve with over time.

- **Neighborhood.** Neighborhood scale commercial centers serve the everyday shopping needs of people within a 3-mile radius and typically are 3-15 acres in size. Neighborhood centers usually are anchored with a grocery store and have a series of smaller and mid-sized retail shops and outlying pad developments serving convenience and service needs. Drug stores, banks, restaurants, video rental, barber shops, beauty salons, drycleaners, service stations and similar uses may be found in such centers often in a combination of in-line shops and one or more freestanding pads.

- **Community.** Community scale shopping centers are generally 10-40 acres in size and serve a 3-6 mile radius. The community commercial center typically has one or more major tenants, such as national discount retail, department store, electronic products, home improvement center, supermarket, home furnishing, sporting goods and entertainment uses. It is meant to meet general shopping needs while also providing a wider range of goods and services than is typically found in neighborhood centers. A community scale shopping center may be configured as a power center with big-box discount and home improvement anchors or it may feature a lifestyle focus, such as with fashion apparel, entertainment uses, restaurants and other specialty outlets.

- **Regional.** Major shopping centers, regional malls or power centers can be 40-200 acres in size and typically serve an area 5-25 miles in radius or larger. Regional centers typically are defined by a series of major anchor tenants establishing a theme ranging from department stores, mass market discount, general merchandise, specialty marketing, fashion apparel, home improvement, warehouse club, and/or factory outlet.

- **Mixed Use Developments.** Office, retail and even residential uses may be appropriately integrated within a mixed-use development. The scale of the development is less important than the balance and transition between uses. The design details need to be carefully considered to allow adequate transitions and separations where necessary for effective integration of uses.

- **Specialty Centers.** Specialty shopping centers are not limited by size. They are defined by the use, which typically features non-essential, more affluent, leisurely or recreational shopping, as well as various entertainment and restaurant experiences. There is no specific service area identified, as these centers are typically a destination, often as a tourist attraction.

- **Hybrid Centers.** Recent trends in regional shopping center development have resulted in the creation of new types of commercial centers that combine several types of shopping and service orientations. The traditional mall with its department store anchors has been joined by big-box, mass-market discount outlets, as well as unique lifestyle specialty shops located in a village streetscape or festival marketplace scenario. Hybrid configurations could occur at any scale but are typically larger. The combination of various marketing aspects breaks down traditional definitions of shopping centers and responds to shifting market-based trends.

IV. GENERAL DESIGN POLICY FOR COMMERCIAL CENTERS

The Commercial Center Development Policy is intended to provide policy direction related to the design of shopping centers, multi-tenant commercial centers, and mixed-use commercial developments.

1. SITE DESIGN

- **Integrated Site Design Theme**
  The site design, which includes the orientation and layout of buildings, circulation and parking lot layout, landscaping, drainage retention and various other site features, should be designed with an integrated theme which ties the entire development together as a unified whole.

- **Building Layout**
  It is preferred that commercial development with multiple uses and multiple tenants should be designed with attached or clustered buildings with careful attention to the interconnecting quality of landscaping, open space and pedestrian areas. Commercial centers should not be designed solely as a collection of detached, separate pad buildings as this is the least desirable arrangement for providing integrated quality environments.

- **Pad Developments**
  Separate freestanding sites developed within a commercial center are referred to as “pad” developments. Pad developments should be integrated into the site design in terms of parking lot layout, on-site vehicular and pedestrian circulation routes, landscaping, and building design. The building design of pads should be complimentary to the surrounding center in terms of materials, colors and design details. Freestanding pad developments should be carefully located on the site in relation to the main commercial center in terms of scale, proportion and visibility.

- **Pedestrian Quality**
  The quality of the pedestrian environment should be considered as a central defining aspect of the site layout and design theme for all types of commercial centers. Various types of on-site pedestrian facilities, including interconnecting circulation routes, building entrance areas and the connecting spaces between buildings should be designed not only to address safety, function and efficiency but also to provide a high quality experience for people who work, shop and visit at the development.

- **Site Entrance**
  Driveway entrances are required to address engineering standards for safety and efficiency, including minimum setback from corner, minimum separation distance between driveways, and alignment with turn lanes and median breaks. In addition, driveway entrances should be aligned with on-site circulation routes in a coherent and safe manner. Community scale commercial developments should be developed with at least one major driveway entrance feature that provides an organizing element to the site design. Neighborhood scale commercial centers should also consider the quality of primary and secondary site entrance features as a defining aspect of the site design. Major driveway entrances can include such features as a landscaped entry corridor and/or a divided median drive separated by a landscaped center dividing island.

- **Character Area**
  Commercial development that is proposed within a planning sub-area would be expected to address the character area design policy that is created for that sub-area of the city, such as Desert Uplands, Williams Gateway, Citrus Sub-Area, Town Center or any other area as designated. The site design, including the interrelationship of buildings, open space, circulation patterns and other factors, should consider the intent of any character area policy that applies.

2. BUILDING DESIGN

- **Integrated Theme**
  Buildings and structures within commercial centers should be developed with an integrated architectural theme that includes similar materials, colors and design details. The design of various structures and buildings are not expected to be identical, however, the design elements throughout a commercial development should provide a complimentary theme.

- **Architectural Development**
  Achieving a high quality of architectural design for all types of commercial buildings should be considered as a principal goal of the design guidelines. There is a point at which a building exceeds its basic functional requirements and begins to address a higher standard of community purpose. All types of commercial centers developed in Mesa are expected to seek a higher standard of quality architectural design.

- **Character Area Design Theme**
  Building design is expected to address any specific design theme that exists within an identified character area, such as Desert Uplands, Williams Gateway, Citrus Sub-Area, Town Center or other area as determined or which may be developed at some future time.

- **Four-Sided Architecture**
  Commercial development should take into account the architectural design of all building elevations, including those sides of a building that are primarily only visible from within a property and/or from adjacent properties, as well as those visible from the public right-of-way. It is the intent of the design guidelines to ensure that quality design is expressed on all elevations of a building.

- **Building Entrance**
  The building entrance is an important organizational feature that provides a transitional element between the inside and outside functions. The architectural details of a building entrance should be integrated with the overall building design in terms of materials, scale, proportion, and design elements. The design and location of building entrances should take into account the quality of pedestrian circulation, landscaping and protection from the elements.

- **Prototypes**
  Exact duplicate prototypes are generally not acceptable as a solution for the design of commercial developments. The ideal solution is that each commercial development should respond to the specific concerns of its site. It is understood the chain developments want to present a consistent corporate identity; however, the proliferation of exact replicas throughout the city creates an anonymous, bland, characterless environment. The building footprint, building massing and general design scheme may be repeated to some degree but it would be expected that materials, colors and various design details would be compatible with the context of surrounding development and the intent of any relevant character planning sub-area that may be defined.

3. TRANSPORTATION AND PARKING

- **Vehicular Circulation**
  Safe convenient vehicular circulation should be provided within commercial developments. Depending on the scale of the development, there should be an appropriate system of internal vehicular circulation routes based on a hierarchy of drive aisles and cross routes so as to address efficient, safe movement and parking throughout the site. For larger developments consider providing a system of main collector-type drive aisles to organize the overall site circulation with secondary aisles providing direct loading of parking spaces.

- **Alternate Modes Transportation**
  All modes of transportation, including pedestrian, bicycle and public transit, should be considered in the development of commercial centers. People who walk, bicycle or ride the bus are also customers and employees. Pedestrian, bicycle and transit facilities associated with commercial centers should be designed with the goals of safety, efficiency, accessibility and comfort. Both the on-site needs and the off-site connections between adjacent public right-of-way should be addressed for all modes of transportation.

- **Pedestrian Facilities**
  It is a principal objective of the Commercial Center Development Policy that a quality pedestrian environment is provided in all types of development. The function and appearance of pedestrian facilities should be considered in areas around buildings, within parking lots, with connecting routes and throughout the site. Pedestrian facility design should take into account basic traffic safety concerns, such as provision of adequate pathway width, sight distance consideration, appropriate signage, separation from vehicular traffic and appropriate design and placement of cross walks. Additionally, pedestrian facilities should provide an attractive quality environment with integrated landscaping, shading, lighting, surface treatment and other amenities.

- **Bicycle Facilities**
  Bikeway facilities, including wide travel lanes, striped bicycle lanes, off-road pathways, and bicycle-parking facilities should be considered within commercial developments where appropriate to the scale of the development. Where vehicular traffic moves slower it can be expected that bicycles can safely mix with the flow of automobiles in the traffic lane. In larger commercial developments and where heavier bicycle traffic is expected it may be appropriate to consider various options, including wider drive aisles, designated bicycle lanes and/or a system of separate pathways for bicycles.

- **Bicycle Parking**
  The provision of adequate, safe and convenient bicycle parking facilities is an important component of a comprehensive program to encourage the use of bicycles as a viable transportation option. The location should be close to building entrances, easily identifiable, visible to those passing by and separate from pedestrian circulation areas. Covered areas that provide shade and protection from rain are preferred. Long-term bicycle parking facilities are attractive for employment centers, schools, transit nodes and other such uses where people will leave the bicycle for all or part of a day. Long-term bicycle parking should provide a high degree of security and safety through the use of bicycle lockers, designated areas within buildings or outside areas with constant visual monitoring. Short-term bicycle parking should be located in highly visible locations near the building entrance with inverted “U” shaped loop racks or similar design instead of ribbon or wave-type racks, which are less effective for locking the bicycle.

- **Transit Facilities**
  Private development should work with the City to coordinate the location and design of attractive bus shelters and other types of transit facilities adjacent to commercial centers. Transit facilities are encouraged to be developed with effective shading from the summer sun, comfortable seating, attractive landscaping, decorative paving, public art features and efficient pedestrian routes to adjacent development. For larger planned developments it is encouraged to consider coordination of on-site transit routes and related facilities, such as bus stops.

- **Parking Lot Layout**
  Parking areas within commercial centers should be considered as an integral part of the design of the development. Drive aisles need to be designed in a safe, convenient manner for vehicle movement and to minimize vehicular and pedestrian conflicts. The parking lot layout should be oriented in relation to the building entrance so that pedestrians are encouraged to walk parallel to vehicular movement in the aisle and not across rows of parking and drive aisles to reach their

destination. In addition, landscape islands and medians, as well as interconnected networks of pedestrian walkways should be designed as an integrated component of the parking lot layout.

- **Cross Access**
  Providing vehicular and pedestrian access between developments is highly encouraged through the use of cross access connections. The availability of vehicular cross access between abutting parcels helps to minimize on-street maneuvering and traffic in the right-of-way and encourages greater customer interaction between businesses. Pad developments should have internal cross access to any surrounding commercial development. Cross access typically includes legally recorded easements or agreements to ensure that long-term physical access will be provided between abutting parcels. Providing adequate pedestrian cross access also helps to address safety concerns and to minimize short distance vehicular trips within a development.

- **Traffic Calming**
  The use of traffic calming techniques is encouraged within commercial developments. These design features are intended to slow traffic and divert any cut through traffic so as to provide a safer and more attractive environment for people. Such techniques should be considered as part of comprehensive, integrated transportation and site layout strategy. Traffic calming techniques include such features as wide speed humps, raised crosswalks, raised intersections, traffic circles and roundabouts, landscaped medians and diverters, and travel lane narrow points also known as traffic chokers and curb bulb-outs. Narrow speed bumps are the least desirable type of traffic calming device and should be avoided since speed bumps can cause loss of control of the vehicle at higher speeds.

- **Speed Bumps**
  Speed bumps are discouraged as traffic control devices within developments. Thin raised strips of asphalt placed perpendicular to the flow of traffic have the effect of slowing traffic due to the potential for causing injury or loss of vehicular control at normal speeds. Preferred methods of controlling traffic speeds include various traffic calming techniques that are integrated into the design of on-site circulation routes.

- **Drive-thru Facilities**
  Drive-thru lanes for restaurants, banks, pharmacies and other uses should be integrated with the overall site layout so as to provide safe, efficient, integrated vehicular and pedestrian circulation. Adequate vehicular stacking or queuing space should be provided to avoid waiting vehicles from blocking drive aisles. Drive-thru facilities should be located so as to minimize the visual impact from right-of-way and to provide adequate screening from internal uses.

- **Loading Docks**
  Loading docks should be located away from the street and screened from public view. Where a loading dock is located adjacent to any residential use there should be adequate separation and screening with a combination of masonry walls and landscaping so as to minimize the effects of noise and disturbance on neighbors.

- **Drop-Off Zones**
  Areas to safely drop off and pick up passengers and to load goods into vehicles are an important feature for many commercial uses, such as grocery stores, drugstores, movie theaters, and home improvement centers. Drop-off zones should be integrated into the design of the commercial centers with attractive paving, adequate separation of vehicles and pedestrians, and convenient location near building entrances. Using attractive paving material for the drop-off zone, such as paving blocks or colored concrete, can help to define the drop-off zone. The vehicle stopping area for the drop-off zone should not block traffic in the drive aisle.

- **Covered Parking**
  Covered parking is an attractive feature for commercial parking lots that serve employees and other types of long-term vehicle parking. Parking canopies provide much appreciated shade for vehicles in the hot desert environment. Covered parking structures should be designed to be compatible with the surrounding development. Where covered parking is integrated with landscape islands, the canopy structure should be setback from any adjacent landscape area for a sufficient distance to allow adequate tree and plant growth.

4. PEDESTRIAN FACILITIES

- **Walkways**
  Pedestrian walkways should be designed as interconnected continuous routes within a development and to the adjacent public right-of-way. Interconnected walkways within a development should be designed with complimentary materials, colors and design features, including unified landscape patterns, similar shading strategies, integrated infrastructure elements and a consistent theme for paving materials. Pedestrian circulation facilities, including walkway surfaces, screening walls, seating areas, lighting, landscaping and associated signage, should be compatible with the overall development.

- **Meandering Walkways**
  Pedestrian walkways should be direct and avoid unnecessary meandering solely for decorative purposes. Sidewalks and walkways can be designed with gentle, wide radius curves or a series of slightly angled deflections so as to create some interest but such features should be carefully considered to avoid excessive meandering.

- **Walkway Corridors:**
  Separate walkway corridors within parking lots and through a site should have adequate width dedicated to the pedestrian walkway exclusive of any vehicle overhang area or other obstructions. The corridor should have adequate width to allow effective planting areas for landscaping.

- **Obstructions**
  Obstructions, including light poles, sign posts, utility boxes, landscaping, and miscellaneous street furniture should not be located within the pathway travel area. Maintain a minimum side clearance adjacent to the travel surface.

- **Crosswalks**
  Where pedestrian circulation routes cross vehicular traffic aisles and driveways within a development, there should be clearly delineated crosswalks that include clear sight lines, adequate warning signage for both vehicles and pedestrians, adequate lighting, and protective barrier posts or similar features for separation at walkway entrances. The use of different paving materials, such as concrete, brick, or interlocking paving block for the crosswalk surface can help to emphasize the special characteristics of the pedestrian crossing through the use of both visual and textural changes to the surface. Highly textured surfaces, including some types of stamped concrete or coble stone, should be avoided for the main travel surface due to the potential for tripping and catching wheels. The preferred location for crosswalks is at intersections of streets and/or drive aisles; crosswalks in the middle of drive aisles should be carefully located with adequate visibility and warning for both pedestrians and drivers.

- **Bollards**
  Barrier posts or bollards are an effective method to separate vehicular traffic from pathways or pedestrian circulation areas. When located across a pedestrian circulation route, there should be an odd number of barrier posts, such as one, three or five; an even number of posts, such as two or four, tends to direct opposing traffic towards each other, thereby increasing the potential for collision.

5. SITE AMENITIES

- **Project Name**
  Commercial centers can benefit from having a project name that is easy to identify, relates well to the site, is not similar to other project names, does not result in any public safety conflict, is in good taste and is approved by the Planning Department as appropriate. The project name can be integrated with site identification signage to provide a unified theme.

- **Decorative Paving**
  Decorative paving materials should be considered for pedestrian walkways, crosswalks, intersections, building entrance areas and other pedestrian oriented areas, such as courtyards, seating areas and plazas. The use of brick, concrete block, cut stone, integral color concrete, ceramic tile, stamped concrete and similar durable, dust free, hard surfaced materials should be considered for decorative paving applications. Highly textured materials should be avoided for areas where direct pedestrian travel is expected due to tripping hazards. Wheelchair accessibility should be considered when considering decorative paving details.

- **Shade Areas**
  Pedestrian areas, such as walkways, building entrances and gathering areas, should be adequately shaded from the summer sun through such techniques as the careful placement of trees and landscaping, trellis structures, projecting canopies, covered walkways, arcades, porticos, building orientation and similar techniques.

- **Seating and Benches**
  Locate seating areas and benches in shaded areas that are generally close to areas of activity but will not otherwise block or cause congestion along circulation routes or at building entrances. Seating that is built in to low walls in landscaped areas is an attractive design feature.

- **Drinking Fountains**
  Public drinking fountains are less common in outdoor areas due to maintenance, liability and economic concerns but are still a very attractive feature that is greatly appreciated by people living in a desert environment. Developers are encouraged to provide public drinking fountains as an attractive amenity in quality commercial centers. Outdoor public drinking fountains should be located in shaded areas but not in the direct pathway of circulation routes. Drinking fountains can be the focal point on an attractive outdoor landscaped courtyard seating area.

- **Lighting**
  Pedestrian scale lighting fixtures are encouraged for nighttime illumination. Carefully placed lighting of pedestrian areas, walkways, parking lots, building features, and landscaping must address the City Code requirements for outdoor lighting so as to minimize excessive lighting of the night sky. A combination of attractively designed and located lighting fixtures, including low pole lights, ground mounted fixtures, light bollards and architectural lighting is encouraged so as to provide interesting compositions for outdoor lighting, as well as a safe, secure environment.

- **Public Art**
  Public art comes in many forms and adds greatly to the value of project by providing attractive, lively, unique and aesthetically pleasing experiences for people to enjoy in Mesa. Traditional public art concepts include sculptures installed as a visual focal point of an outdoor area. Public art can also include interesting water features, walls, benches, bridges, paving elements, gates, bike racks, kiosks and various other non-traditional artistic expressions, such as lighting features and landscape environments. Contact the City of Mesa Public Art Program for more information.

- **Rest Rooms**
  Public rest rooms are a desirable feature in commercial centers. Such facilities may be located within buildings or can be accessible from outdoor public areas. Maintenance and security are important concerns that should be considered in the placement, design and management of any public rest room facilities.

- **Public Telephones**
  Public telephones are less common due to the widespread use of personal mobile phones. If public telephones are included in commercial centers, they should be located in safe, secure, visible areas with adequate nighttime lighting. They should not be located directly in the main pathway of a pedestrian circulation route but should be close to general activity areas. Provide adequate shade from summer sun.

- **Information Kiosk**
  Flat panel or multi-sided kiosks are useful for providing a range of directional and site information. Site location maps, general information and special notices add to the liveliness of the commercial development. Kiosks should be designed to match the site architecture and be integrated into the layout of pedestrian circulation areas.

- **Decorative Water Features**
  Fountains, waterfalls, pools and other decorative water features can provide a soothing, cooling effect in the hot desert climate but should be carefully placed to avoid excessive loss of water from evaporation or spillage. Water safety regulations are a prime concern for design and placement of water features. Large spray type fountains with exposure to strong wind patterns should be avoided due to high evaporation rates. All water features should be designed with water circulating systems. All City Code regulations regarding water features and pools should be followed.

- **Trash Receptacles**
  The design details, materials, and colors of trash receptacles should be integrated with the overall design of the commercial center. The location should not create any obstacles to safe pedestrian circulation within a site.

- **Refuse Enclosures**
  As per the Design Guidelines and City Standard Details and Specifications, the design of refuse enclosures should be compatible with the site development and otherwise meet all requirements of the City's Solid Waste program.

6. OPEN SPACE

- **Public Open Space**
  Public open space should be located in proximity to areas of activity, such as primary circulation routes and building entrances. Usable open space areas should generally be located in larger, more prominent, easily accessible areas. Secondary, remote locations or smaller, scattered sites on the periphery of activity areas are less likely to be used than those closer to more active areas. Building entrances, major site connectors and other focal points are preferred for locating useable open space, such as plazas, courtyards and landscaped seating areas.

- **Entry Plazas**
  Larger individual commercial uses are required by the Zoning Ordinance to provide an entry plaza for general pedestrian circulation, and loading and unloading. Smaller commercial uses and group commercial developments are also encouraged to provide entry plazas for pedestrian circulation, and passenger drop-off and loading areas. Such areas are encouraged to include unique, decorative paving materials, adequate seating areas, provision of adequate shade from the summer sun and attractive landscaping, including trees or raised planters.

- **Courtyards**
  Courtyards provide effective intermediary gathering points, offer opportunities for architectural integration of buildings and open space, and can serve as an organizing element for multiple pedestrian circulation routes. Courtyards are typically separated from general circulation areas by use of landscaping, screening walls, and/or building placement. Courtyards are enhanced by the use of decorative paving materials, integrated landscaping, built-in benches and low walls for seating, pedestrian scale lighting, and public art, including decorative water features.

- **Outdoor Employee Area**
  Outdoor employee areas should be integrated into the site design in terms of location, design details, materials and colors. The employee area should be in a location separate from areas of general public circulation with adequate screening from public view while still addressing public safety concerns. These areas should provide adequate pedestrian-scale night lighting and adequate shading from the summer sun.